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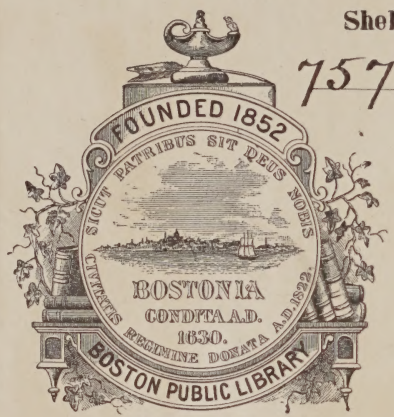

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THE RELATIONS AND DUTIES OF THE RICH TO THE POOR, AND ESPECIALLY TO THIS CHARITY.

A

SERMON

DELIVERED IN BEHALF OF THE

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WARREN STREET CHAPEL

AT THE

Ninth Anniversary of the Opening of the Building,

JANUARY 26, 1845.

BY REV. F. D. HUNTINGTON,

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Lindsay Swift
July 24, 1896

SERMON.

Eccl. IV. 13.

"BETTER IS A POOR AND A WISE CHILD, THAN AN OLD AND FOOLISH KING, THAT WILL NO LONGER BE ADMONISHED." And,

Prov. XIII. 7.

"THERE IS THAT MAKETH HIMSELF RICH, YET HATH NOTHING: THERE IS THAT MAKETH HIMSELF POOR, YET HATH GREAT RICHES."

THAT is, there are better possessions than houses, lands, money, or the splendor that is in king's palaces. A man may have all these and yet be very poor. Large estates do not constitute real wealth or welfare, nor does a prosperous business always secure it. Your daily income may be the revenue of a prince, and yet you may be a most pitiable pauper. You may own well filled ware-houses, and they may be free from all incumbrances; no man can take them away from you; they shall be yours as long as you live; and yet you may have no enduring substance. There is such a thing as the "poor rich man," and there are too many specimens of that sort of man in the world. You may inhabit a sumptuously furnished dwelling, with elegantly adorned apartments, costly fabrics and loaded tables of luxuries, and be starving and houseless notwithstanding. You may see gold and silver pouring in upon you in streams of flowing abundance, from successful speculations, in unexampled dividends from well-invested funds, in enormous per centage from profitable stocks, and be pinched with want and penury after all.

"There is that scattereth," said the wise man,—and with some of his best wisdom he said it, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth. And there is that withholdeth, but it tendeth to poverty." "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." And the explanation of all this apparent paradox and contradiction, is in the simple words spoken by Jesus at the conclusion of one of his striking parables: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

On the other hand, it is equally true, that men and women in the midst of privation may be, at the same time, endowed with a most generous affluence. There is such a thing as the "rich poor man;" and, thank Heaven, examples of that sort abound also. Their daily fare may be frugal; but their cravings after a higher nourishment, the bread of life and the water of life, are all satisfied. Their apparel may be plain and coarse; but they have that inward adorning, in the hidden man of the heart, "even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price." Their furniture may be scanty,—such only as the most rigid economy can provide; but there are many things of priceless value and not purchasable with gold, laid up in the invisible chambers of their souls. Their means are narrow, but their affections are broad; their income small, but their sympathies large and all-embracing; their support uncertain, but their cheerfulness perennial, and their faith permanent, abiding, unchangeable and undecaying. No moth nor rust can touch it, nor thieves purloin it. They may be very dependent for their outward comfort on their fellows; but for the inward peace, and the unseen consolation, they depend on none but the Almighty God, and He will not take it away. What they *receive* is but the portion of poverty. It is what they impart, of love, good-will, and good examples,—it is this that makes them rich. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth;" "there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches."

My friends, these are not mere assertions. They are not a mere repetition of words put together for rhetorical purposes, and without any foundation in reality, or any echo in

the heart. They are but faint images and imperfect expressions of a momentous fact. There is a truth here that is felt in human breasts, as well as written down by human hands. I believe that wealth, disjoined from a good understanding, a liberal culture of the mind, and pure, innocent affections, inflicts its own punishment. It imposes its own burden. It utters its own curse. Let the man be able to count his thousands, and yet, if he is not a true and worthy man after all, he will know it. His thousands cannot conceal it from him, and cover up the disagreeable conviction. He will *perceive* the emptiness and the darkness within him. If there are no high principles, noble purposes, manly and holy aims in him, he will have a vivid and terrible sense of the vacancy and the desolation. There will be some occasional moments, at least, that will reveal it to him, and he will stand hungering and thirsting in the midst of his opulence. Heaps of dross will not utterly suppress and extinguish the strong activity of conscience. In the midst of the gayest companionships, he will feel himself miserably alone; destitute amidst a world of plenty; and with an atmosphere colder than that the polar ice engenders, about his frozen heart-strings, even under the most brilliant sunshine of worldly fortune. There is no danger that the shallow, selfish, unprincipled, narrow-minded victim of wealth will fail to find his worthlessness out. He may not have moral strength, firmness, and patient effort enough to struggle out of it, and escape from it; but the consciousness of it will not let him alone; it will forever haunt him and torment him till he is changed; till he owns that he has a spirit, and proves his renewal by his better life. When that happens, he will have found greater possessions; the true riches. His fortune will sink back in his regards, into the secondary and insignificant place that belongs to it. He will be not the worse for it, then, nor the better for it, but he will be above it. He has that which will make him a *man*, with or without it. He is not the slave of his possessions, but the master of them, and his own freeman. Under Christ's kingdom, says another, "The poor shall know themselves to be men, and the rich shall know themselves to be *but* men."

So, too, precisely, of the opposite instance. That poor

woman, obscure and humble, and close pressed with penury, —if her soul is full of serene trust and holy prayers, and beautiful submission, and patient hope, she does not need to be *told* how rich she is. She looks calmly on her little store of earthly goods, but feels no shame. Anxiety she may feel, and suffering, and a natural solicitude for herself, or for those she loves,—but no humiliation. The boundless aspirations of the infinite nature God has given her as her indestructible patrimony, swell up and fill the wants of her heart. The wide fields of the land of spiritual promise are all hers, and she will not exchange them for the pomp and pageantry of empires,—no, not for all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.

The substance of the matter then, thus far, is, that property, outward property, does not constitute the real and right distinction between one man and another; nor does it determine the worth of a man. There is another distinction, another wall of separation, vaster and loftier, that towers up and throws all these petty contrasts of hovel and palace, fine raiment and coarse raiment, gentility and rusticity,—throws them all into one deep and common shadow, and makes them invisible alike. And that distinction is character,—character, with all the elements that enter into and make up character. Here is something by which you may test the value of an individual, and decide upon it with confidence. Unbending rectitude, unflinching integrity, purified emotions, a gentle kindness, a self-denying brotherly love, a brave moral courage, and a Christian faith,—here are qualities that tell plainly and to the comprehension of all mankind, just what an individual really is. And the absence of them, or the qualities contrary to these, tell just as plainly what a man is not. Taken together, these qualities constitute character, and, judging by that standard, there *is* a difference, an actual difference between the worth of man and man. Understand, however, that the line of separation does not coincide with the line that separates rich and poor. It crosses that line. It is drawn with no reference to it. It has the destitute and the affluent mingled together, on either side.

These points being established,—and no Christian believer will be disposed, I presume, to dispute them,—we are ready

for the inquiry, What are the relations which the rich sustain to the poor? What duties do the rich owe to the poor? The questions are clear, and we have the means, from one source and another, especially from our Christian Religion,—we have the means of an intelligible and satisfactory reply. The rich and the poor are related together by the most intimate and sacred ties. They are united by the closest and strongest bonds. Fashion and rank may erect artificial barriers to keep them apart. Arbitrary lines may be drawn to divide them into different classes. And so long as there is a great discrepancy of tastes, a very striking inequality of culture, it may not be desirable, so far as the social life is concerned, that they shall be thrown into constant contact,—into the same company. Neither class will desire it at present, and no considerable edification will grow out of it, but only embarrassment and confusion. They do stand, however, notwithstanding this diversity of attainments—they do all stand on the ground of a common nature. They all have hearts; they all have souls; they share in one universal humanity; they have kindred sufferings and joys, hopes and fears, trials and aspirations, spiritual longings and powers. Perhaps they are fellow-citizens of the same country. At any rate they are of one family. They have one God, the same Saviour,—and the same immortal destiny held out and offered to them. Each class, too, is better for the other,—the rich for the poor, and the poor for the rich. In many respects they have a common interest, and they ought to feel that it is so. They have a reciprocal dependence, the one upon the other. They should be held together for a purpose of mutual benefit, helpfulness and improvement; and whatever produces alienation between them, whether the pride of the rich or the envy and suspicion of the poor, is by all means to be deprecated and resisted. I can conceive few viler works to which a low, vicious and grovelling mind can degrade itself, than to be stirring up jealousies between the wealthy and the destitute; to kindle bitter animosities and foment discords and contentions between the more and the less favored orders, as they are sometimes called. They have not two causes, but one cause; not hostile and conflicting objects to accomplish, but the same object, if they will only so under-

stand it. They have not opposite ends to strive after, but a single end. And every possible influence should be contributed to fasten them more indissolubly together; to unite them into a sympathizing brotherhood; to win them into an agreeing fellowship; to attune their hearts, aims and lives to an undisturbed and beautiful harmony. Christ loved to lift up the lowly, to an elevation equal with the noblest. He lingered over repulsive disease, pitied the impotent, called blind Bartimeus to his side, blessed the poor widow, and smiled on Mary Magdalen. Christianity breaks down all exclusive walls between castes, classes and colors, as between sects, names and nations. It looks deeper, sets up a purer standard, and proposes an altogether original classification, the division into the faithful and the false.

If this, then, my friends, is the true relationship of the rich to the poor; if they are placed together, in all that pertains to the higher objects of life, by the spirit of the New Testament and of Humanity, then the duties of the rich to the poor begin to be the more apparent. Let us look at them a little, and more particularly. I say nothing here of the corresponding duties of the poor to the rich, because this occasion is not designed for such a discussion. I willingly leave the inculcation of those to the constant teachings of a ministry like this, whose anniversary we are observing.

The first general duty on the part of the rich, is to observe, keep in mind and bring more into notice these true distinctions of a man that I have described, and to disregard and put away the false ones. That is, if it is culture, mental and moral education, a sound mind and a good heart, if it is these that make one man superior to another, then the rich ought to be sensible of it, and to act accordingly. They ought to do nothing to preserve and perpetuate those other mistaken notions, that it is the mere appendages of a man—what is outside of him—silks and broadcloths, furniture and equipage, that make him a noble being, and furnish him with a passport to stations of influence and power. They ought to show, by every possible means, that they are not dazzled and bewildered, as little children are, by the glitter of external things. They should outgrow this puerile susceptibility to be "pleased with a rattle," to be carried away with tinsel

decorations; to go into ecstacies at the sight of yellow gold, and to have supreme faith in that as the first good of life. They ought to prove by their deeds and speech that they hold goodness and truth in chief honor; that they do, in their deepest souls, verily reverence integrity, purity and intelligence above all things else; that they must and will bow to character, no matter what garb it comes in; that they will make room for honest and single-hearted worth, no matter what it wears or shelters itself with. There are few delusions more melancholy than that which sophisticates with a human soul, and persuades it that mere possession is a title to esteem, that puffs up a man's mind with a foolish pride because a few pounds more or less of coin or paper are at his disposal. And, on the contrary, there are few sights that more kindle our admiration, stir the finer emotions of our hearts, and lift up and expand our whole nature, than when a man of property comes out of the trial with his moral sense uncorrupted, his aims still generous and broad, his estimate of mankind right and true, his sympathies stretching beyond his estates, and his benevolent and Christian spirit making him the steward of God's gifts for glorious uses. Such a soul rises up loftily towards Heaven, with a kind of mountain majesty, a colossal grandeur, out of the low dead level of our common, grasping selfishness. Let us thank God for such examples, for they are to be found among us. Let us have more of them, and let us imitate them. Yes, fellow Christians, look in upon the poor man's, or the poor child's heart, where the eye of the Almighty always looks. Is he self-denying; is he meek and patient and faithful; is he without complaint, notwithstanding his crosses and anxieties, honest in spite of his necessities, blameless against his temptations, victorious over his lot, with a brave loyalty to duty lodged in him? If he is, oh, befriend him, and encourage him, and help him on, for God will surely bless him also, and bless you, too, for your beneficence.

But, then, they that have worldly abundance entrusted to them have something more to do; and if they are imbued with these sentiments, they will be ready to do it. They have that at their command which may promote and extend this mental and spiritual culture. They have the means,—

and more than means sufficient to secure their own improvement. The poor cannot have wisdom without instruction. They are not an exception to the ordinary laws that govern mankind. They must be taught. They must learn, step by step, and by the constant instilling of the truth, how to value these immortal treasures within them. There are old prejudices, wrong associations, pernicious customs long grown familiar, that they must be delivered from. Light must be poured in: it will not come of itself. The holy influences of our religion, gentle and pure and sanctifying influences, must be brought around them. They must come and throw their loving arms around these neglected and down-trodden and out-cast ones. And there must be some to bring these influences. If there is a message for the poor, there must be messengers. There must be disinterested and self-sacrificing disciples as teachers—men and women; there must be lips touched with the inspiration of all Christian affections, and tongues moved by the promptings of a living and throbbing philanthropy. And there must be among us, too, gathering-places, and books, and all the accessories that shall make this instruction a successful and efficient instrument. And, to maintain these instrumentalities, there must be resources. Those resources you—the better conditioned portion of the community, are the stewards of. Impart of them; apply them to their best use; and the act shall liberalize and strengthen you. It will give you an unspeakable satisfaction now, send peace to your dying hours, and be a blessed memory to you forever.

In what I have just said, I have briefly and partially described the Institution in whose behalf we have come here this evening. It is an institution that proposes to educate, by various suitable ministrations, and especially by spiritual culture, the youthful character; to dignify and exalt and ennoble that character—in one word, to christianize it. It would take and guard and foster the soul, in its early freshness and simplicity, before it has been much tampered with by temptation, before it has been despoiled of its best natural traits by unholy biases and vicious companionships. The spirit of this establishment is one that will bring up the right

grades of esteem and sink the wrong ones. It is a spirit that adopts the language of the text, and believes that "a poor and a wise child is better than an old and foolish king, that will no longer be admonished;" that a genuine wisdom in the humblest and feeblest is better than a proud, empty-minded, cold-hearted, self-willed royalty. And so it puts forth its many hands and its untiring energies to awaken the human spirit, to quicken the affections, and to invigorate and discipline the noblest faculties. It seeks to impart to the children gathered under its care that imperishable inward possession from which all other possessions take their value, without which they are all less than the dust in the balance.

It sometimes happens that we live long in the immediate vicinity of some excellent institution, without fully appreciating its usefulness, or even acquainting ourselves with its operations. Its very proximity and familiarity give us the impression that we need not investigate it. And while we see it daily, we do not meditate on its importance, nor thoroughly understand the nature of it. May not something like this be true of this ministry of which I am speaking? I am ready, on my own part, to be the first to confess such a fault. I am never brought into closer intimacy with the weekly scenes that are enacted in this chapel, through a more careful investigation of them, or by being present among them, without being impressed in an ever-new and more striking measure, by their singular consistency with the spirit of our Christian faith,—by the beautiful and cheering illustrations they afford of the adaptedness of that faith to every condition and every soul. The influences that stretch out from this spot are of such a sort as cannot be measured or counted; but they can be felt; I rejoice that they can be felt; they can be conceived, and they can engage our hearty good-will and our cordial coöperation. They spread out from this centre, in ten thousand multiplying ramifications, like roots into the soil from the germinating seed, striking deeper and deeper, and by their living and binding strength, they make the whole ground-work of society on which we stand more firm. Gleams of a moral illumination shine out from the Sabbath services that are witnessed here, that survive, and make the whole atmosphere more genial. The beam is not quenched

either, by the engagements and the pleasures of the week. It burns on; it penetrates many a hovel and cellar and garret and workshop. The wandering child takes home the story of what he has heard and seen; the salutary precept, the sacred interest, the fixed attention, communicates itself from one to another of the wondering and listening household circle, from child to parent, and from sister to brother, till all that narrow and darkened abode is gladdened by the songs of Bethlehem, and filled with the light that streamed from the cross on Calvary. Who would not multiply those sweet voices, and scatter abroad that radiance? Brethren it is done—it can and must be done,—only by little and little, and your smallest help is a needed part of the mighty whole. It is not trifling or insignificant, however slight, if it furthers in the least so sublime a cause. Remember that what a man gives, sanctifies, in some sense, all that he has, and all that he is, clothing him and his in a new dignity.

I appeal, then, to the richer and more competent—and by these I mean not the very affluent, not the great capitalist, alone, but all who are in a comfortable independence—all who are not in absolute privation. If they have relations and duties with the poor of the world generally, they have such especially towards this charity. The charity, indeed, speaks to them, if they have open ears and tender hearts—with a voice of its own, and it hardly needs an interpreter. The whole record of Christian philanthropy in the ages, really seems to me, the more I contemplate it, to tell of few more deserving instances of Christian enterprise; few that breathe more purely the breath of Christ's own humane and pitying spirit; few that more commend themselves to the rational and earnest support of a people that would be free, orderly, righteous, and have the Lord for its God. Instead of standing alone, this chapel should have a thousand kindred, a thronging sisterhood. They should dot the surface of every city on the globe, infusing into the city's artificial life purer elements, the living waters, of which he who drinks never thirsts again.

It is an enlightened and a faithful charity. Our alms ought never to be given in ignorance, though we cannot plead our ignorance, as an excuse for not giving, because the

means of knowledge are within our reach, and we are culpable and accountable if we do not use them. It is our duty to give intelligently. And next to a personal examination of the claims of all those who seek our assistance,—which with business men is practicable only to a certain extent,—what method is surer, and safer, and easier, than this, where exact reports make all facts plain, and where every procedure is open to the inspection of the public, and where officers are assigned to the labor, whose judicious prudence equals their unwearied toils? Surely we may trust the intelligence, as confidently as the devotedness, of a benevolent agency such as this.

It is a charity, too, and it is gratifying to say it, that looks to the whole being, the entire constitution, the complete development and edification, of those youths to whom it extends its benefits. As too seldom our educational systems do, it contemplates the harmonious cultivation of all the powers, and will make all right enjoyments tributary, as it makes all the faculties subject, to the supreme sway of Religion. It elevates and refines the taste; it engages the sympathies; it summons the charms, the glory, the magnificence of nature to aid in the accomplishment of its deep designs. It brings music, and unlocks the secret avenues of the heart by its affecting melodies. It goes to the hill-sides and the green forest and the shores of the vast ocean, to deepen and enliven, in those young hearts, the sense of Almighty Goodness, and of the Creator's power. It makes the lilies of the field, the flowers of the valley, and even the mosses of old woods and rocks, its silent teachers and monitors. It has its literature and its science, its libraries, and the beginning, at least, of a cabinet, as well as its pulpit, and its Sabbath teachings and prayers. It inculcates every virtue that fosters self-respect. It rebukes heedlessness, improvidence and waste, and all those foibles that prejudice the interests of society. A fact stated in one of the reports seems to me to speak more than volumes of eulogy and compliment, for the benefactions such an establishment yields to the community, by its lessons of economy, carefulness and honesty. It is stated there, that out of four thousand volumes distributed in loans in a single year from these libraries, not one was lost,

but all were safely restored. It were strange, indeed, if an institution that has such facts written in its history, should fail of support at the hands of a people so shrewd and so sagacious, not to say so liberal, as ours is reputed to be.

This charity approaches the poor, too, so as to win their confidence. It goes to them in that highminded temper that I have endeavored to present as the only acceptable one in which our benevolence can truly act and be welcomed. It does not insult the objects of its assistance. It does not proudly patronize them, hardly deigning to stoop down to notice them, inflicting by a haughty manner more wounds and pain than it heals. It offers fellowship, esteem, confidence. It offers to make the poor estimable and honorable in their own eyes. It tells them of the powers they have, and turns their attention to their minds and spirits, to what they have and what makes them great, rather than to what they have not. It would bring out those nobler distinctions I spoke of, that belong of right to every man, and lift them up to rightful honor. It would follow the doctrine we have been following, and show the indigent that there are better things than outward wealth, even "durable riches and righteousness;" and that "there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches."

And, finally, if the rich would be satisfied that there is not a single reason, not one consideration, that does not prove it to be for their best interest to maintain a charity like this,—let them see what sort of a being it is the object of the influences that operate here to form, out of the youth they act upon. Trace him, from boyhood to the youthful manhood when he goes forth to mingle in your concerns and share in your responsibilities. Listen to the teachings he listens to. And you will find that he is growing up here, taught to be,—not what he might have been if left in the wayward wildness, and ungoverned recklessness he was taken from, a discontented, disorderly mendicant, a dissolute inebriate, a gambler or a highwayman. He has learned no lessons of idleness here. Go into the companies that every week are gathered here to study the arts of a wholesome industry, and be judges yourselves. He will not despise information and hate wisdom. I have seen children under this roof, in

an evening that followed after a day's hard labor, with longing looks upon their countenances, hungry and athirst after the rudiments of knowledge, and with such signs of eager interest as are seldom exhibited, I think, among the tasks of ordinary school-rooms. As they traced their rude marks with hands unpractised in penmanship, it seemed as if they were writing the decree that superstition and darkness must die, and signing the death-warrant of all the injustices and sins that have ignorance for their mother. He will go hence, too, to be no hater of his fellows, no enemy of peace, no traitor of his country, no underminer of your institutions, no dishonest clerk in your counting-rooms, nor thief in your houses, nor slanderer of your reputation, nor forger of your name, nor inmate of your prisons, nor infidel towards God. But you shall find him in all creditable stations, a patriotic citizen, a good neighbor, a valuable helper, a firm friend, a consistent Christian man, sound principles in him and simple affections and manly sentiments of high-souled integrity. Will it be wise for you to neglect an agency that can rear such monuments of its power? Let us rather join our gratitude with that of many a lonely widowed mother, and rescued father, for every young man's sake who has crossed this threshold, and found here the way of the better life.

My friends, the institution of which I have been speaking has reached another, and its ninth, anniversary. I pray God the years of its future may be as many as the months of its past history. It rests with you, and those around you, under His all-gracious permission, to determine, by the energy you throw into it, what the measure of its blessings shall be,—how great a part it shall bear in bringing on that New Kingdom of Holiness and Love which Christ came to build up. Be faithful, for you are responsible!